

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

THE MENDELSSOHN FAMILY (1791-1847). From letters and journals, by SEBASTIAN HIRSCH. Translated by CARL F. HIRSHMAN and an American collaborator, and set out by GEORGE GROVE, esq., D. C. Two vols., \$10, pp. 340, 359. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882.

These "Chronicles of a good middle-class family in Germany" were compiled originally, so the editor tells us, for the eyes of the living representatives of the family only; yielding, however, to the suggestions of friends he put them in print for the public. This was in 1879, and the appearance of a second edition (from which this English translation was made) so soon thereafter can be accepted as evidence of the soundness of this friendly advice. The editor is himself a son of the Mendelssohn family—the only son of Felix's favorite sister Fanny; the translator is the son of Felix's most intimate friend, the recipient of many and the writer of several of the letters which make up the bulk of the book. On every page there are the marks of affectionate and painstaking work.

As the annals of a refined and intellectually brilliant family and the record of the transmission by heredity of mental and moral traits, these volumes are delightfully entertaining; but they must be taken as such, and without the hope of finding in them either weighty or new contributions to the history of the two men whose accomplishments lifted the name of Mendelssohn into prominence.

But while nothing is added to our knowledge of the philosopher who was the vigorous root, or the musician who was the beautiful flower, of this domestic growth, bright glimpses are given into the public and private life of the great members of the family, and many interesting traits and characteristics of the lesser members are unfolded.

The record begins with the birth of Moses Mendelssohn, and ends with the death of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. The essay on Moses Mendelssohn is cleverly written, and gives more evidences of care in its literary preparation than any of the subsequent chapters; but it is sadly incomplete, and unless one can manage to keep steadily in mind the plan of the editor, it is difficult to proceed to the next chapter without an expression of disappointment. There are only thirty pages devoted to one of the lights of German letters, the friend of Lessing and the prototype of his "Nathan the Wise"; the philosopher who by the beauty and vigor of his reasoning on the immortality of the soul won the name of "the German Socrates"; the reformer who by the force of his example and eloquence of his pen lifted the German Jews out of a woeful slough of intellectual and political degradation and opened for them the way to citizenship and social position and influence. Felix Mendelssohn's motives were too pure, his aims and tastes too lofty, and his accomplishments in art too important, for us to wish to detract from them in the least, but it is unquestionable that his fame will prove less enduring than that of the grandfather whom he ranks in these books. The sturdy moral and intellectual vigor, the genuine creative energy, which distinguished Moses Mendelssohn were much diluted in his grandson, and though the gradual waning of the influence of the latter's lovely personality has led in Germany, and is leading in England, to a depreciation of his real merits as a composer, the superiority of the philosopher's powers is indisputable. Yet to that philosopher is given less than one-twentieth of the space in the books.

A merit of this work, to which Mr. Grove calls attention in his short preface, is the new interest with which it clothes Abraham Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the father of the composer. This interest, however, is of a reflex kind. Had he not occupied the position which he himself good-naturedly claimed as in his early years the son of his father and in his later the father of his son, it is questionable whether all that an affectionate grandchild could write about him would have made him the worthy subject of a book. It is only as an example of the speedy fruit of his father's labors in behalf of a despised race that his traits appear worthy of study. He is an intermediary in several respects between the rugged moral and intellectual nature of the philosopher and the refined and some what effeminate sensibility of the musician. While admiring his refined tastes and the wisdom which enabled him in the midst of an active business career to see that his children received just that education which was best calculated to develop the bent of their minds, it is impossible to avoid perceiving a certain subserviency to social prejudices which was very foreign to the character of his father. Born and bred a Jew, he brought up his children as Christians, not because he recognized a higher truth in Christianity than in Judaism, but because it opened wider the door of society. And this he did secretly, that their grandparents might not be displeased. It was not for this that Moses Mendelssohn taught his race to fling away their degrading prejudices against modern learning, to acquire German though it was interdicted by the teachers who wore Rabbinical vestments, and to give their thoughts to living questions instead of to the subtleties of Talmudic lore. He showed the way to independence of thought, but remained from conviction a champion of his race's religion. The position taken by his son is well stated in a letter to his daughter Fanny on the occasion of her confirmation in the year 1820. Out of it all there gleam traces of the patriarchal system of family government which was vigorously maintained in the house of his father, but likewise a clear-eyed effort to change the form of our religion in us and in our conscience. We have educated you and your brother, and your mother, and I, to be like unto us, and that can lead you away from what is good, and must lead you away from love, obedience, tolerance and mitigation even if it offered nothing but the example of its founder, understood by so few, and followed by still fewer.

By pronouncing your profession of faith you have fulfilled the claims of society on you, and obtained the name of a Christian. Now we will be your parents as a human being, and not as a bear, faithful, good, obedient, and we may also say to your mother, and I may also say to your father, unrelenting atten-tion to the voice of your conscience, which may be suppressed but never silenced, and you will gain the highest happiness that is to be found on earth, harmony and contentedness with yourself.

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.—He was a happy letter-writer we know from his published correspondence. The letters which we find in these two volumes do not differ in essence from those with which we were already acquainted. Some pleasant pictures of his London life in 1829, and some observations concerning his tour in Scotland, Wales, and Italy, charm us by their graceful and chatty style. They do not enlighten us much on the questions in art on which artists who can speak, ought to speak. As regards his own ideals and his estimates of the work of other composers, the letters translated by Lady Wallace contain all that he wrote of special interest. The sunshiny disposition which was never clouded until after the death of his favorite sister Fanny, in the last year of his own life, fills these letters; they are as placid, equal, and reposeful as his music. In reading the letters of his sisters Rebeca and Fanny, however, it is difficult to keep down the feeling that they pose and attitude, and ask attention to their cleverness of thought and expression. Many read as though the writers knew that eventually they would be published to the world. As a specimen simply of Felix's style of criticism, for it is not in his best vein as a letter-writer, and as a picture of the theatre in London half a century ago, we append an extract from a letter in which he gives his impressions of Kemble's Hamlet:

"In the evening I went with Rosen, Muhlfeldt and Klingemann to Covent Garden's Hamlet. I believe, though I was right, that I had seen the English sometimes do not understand Shakespeare. At least this representation was not a success; and yet it was played well, and I believe it was played well. But, alas! that way is error, and the whole piece. His appearing for me, I think, was the best part of his performance. The audience, with one yellow and one black leg to indicate madness, his falling before the ghost in order to strike at attitude, his screaming out the last word of his, his behaving altogether like a John Bull Oxford student and not like Danish Crown Prince Frederik. The audience, however, should not the least enter into poor Shakespeare's intention as to killing the King, and therefore coolly skip that scene where the King prays and Hamlet comes in and goes out again without having made up his mind for the deed (to my taste one of the finest passages of the play), and that he constantly behaved as a bravo, treating the King in such a way that he deserved to be sent to prison for treason during the play on the stage threatening him with his fist and shouting into his ear the words that he should have quietly dropped—these ate things not to be passed over. Of course Laertes and Hamlet do not jump into Ophelia's tomb and wrestle there for her, but the stage, though it looks like a large and thorough work, elegant buildings and all, is nevertheless large grounds and location well known for battle scenes. Foreclosures are not to be passed over."

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